

**PRESENT DAY ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS & SOLUTIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the study**

Environmental crisis is looming all around in spite of the fact that there has been tremendous material advancements. There is an utter collapse of ethical values in the world of today. Holistic education is the need of the hour.

**Methodology**

The research methods adopted in this paper are: (i) Historical Method (ii) Descriptive Method (iii) Analytical Method.

**Findings**

Pollution, over population, unemployment, equitable distribution of power, divisive tendencies, prejudiced outlook, consumerism are rampant everywhere. In order to solve these problems education should help human beings to evolve consciously. Skill development with emphasis on labour intensive technology, more employment exchanges, checking pollution and population growth, community engagement programmes, cooperative industrial set ups, developing life skills should be emphasized through education.

**Application**

Education should develop within human beings a feeling to captivate the world rather than conquer it - to co-exist with fellow beings and with nature.

**Novelty/Originality**

This paper has not been published elsewhere. The subject has recently aroused human attention and the conception of the role of education in this area is still in its formative stages.

## **Introduction**

Man today has made tremendous strides in science and technology. Computers and telecommunications have changed the face of the earth to a large extent. It is due to these scientific advancements that man is technologically more capable than ever before. Steps have been taken to remove poverty, malnutrition, gender bias, ecological imbalance, racial violence, illiteracy, social injustice. But what is most alarming is that the world is witnessing an utter collapse of ethical values as a result of material advancements. Money, resource, technology are freely available. Unfortunately, the intent to bring about global well being is lacking. The task of education is to help people to blossom to their fullest extent. But what one finds is that far from blossoming, education is helping man to fit into the economic engine. The world has become an economic engine and man is driving that engine. Economic values have become important because man tries to identify himself with what he has accumulated. This leads to fragmentation and isolation. Education should strive for togetherness and not isolation.

There is inter-connectedness in the universe. For instance, what trees breathe out human beings breathe in and what human beings breathe out trees breathe in. One specie's waste is another specie's food. What is important here is holistic education. Holistic education means development of the whole human being in relationship to the totality. Human beings interact with the physical and social environment and the physical and social environment interact with each other and with the human being. Development of the human personality takes place through the interaction of the individual with his physical and social environment. Unfortunately, the erosion of ethical values in today's world leads to environmental crisis both in the domain of natural and social environments.

## **Crisis in Natural Environment**

The rate of environmental degradation has been tremendously high as a result of the side-effects of developmental activities undertaken by human beings in various sectors. These sectors cover agriculture, industry, transport etc. Most of the environmental problems are exclusively man-made. The major environmental problems which have arisen in the present day can be grouped into five categories:

1. Over-population
2. Pollution
3. Global environmental change
4. Depletion of natural resources, and
5. War and insurgency.<sup>1</sup>

## **1. Over-population**

Over-population is a major cause of environmental degradation. There is an increase of 90 million people each year in the world. This growth in population is not just an increase in birth rate but also an increase in average life expectancy. At the beginning of the twentieth century there were about 1.6 billion people in the world. Now this has increased to 7.2 billion. In 1947, when India became independent, there were about 330 million people. This number has now increased to 1.25 billion. One finds that today a human being consumes what 10,000 human beings consumed a thousand years ago. As per the prediction of the United Nations there will be about 9.6 billion people on this planet by 2050 and 12.1 billion by 2075, if serious steps are not taken to check the population growth. This would imply that human beings will survive on 40% less resources than what they are doing now. Human population should be such that the Planet can sustain.

## **2. Pollution**

There is ecological imbalance. The expansion of industries has also given rise to waste materials and by-products thereby creating pollution and subsequently environmental degradation. Every environmental problem has an impact of short term duration and long term duration. Long term impacts are often ignored due to lack of proper education and inadequate knowledge. Chemical fertilizers are potentially disease producing in man.

Air pollution is rampant everywhere. Air is never pure as a result of natural and man-made pollution. Gases such as Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and Hydrogen sulphide (H<sub>2</sub>S) are continually released into the atmosphere through natural activities like volcanoes, vegetation decay, forest fires and also by man-made activities like oil burning and refining processes. Power plants, factories, vehicles emit carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter that consists of fine particles suspended in the air. Gases, mists, particulates, aerosols are examples of such man-made pollutants. These pollutants are present not more than 2000 feet above ground level. Air pollutants are present in the atmosphere in concentrations that disturb the dynamic equilibrium in the atmosphere and thereby affect man and his environment.<sup>2</sup> Air pollution causes tremendous damage to crops and livestock in countries with heavy industries and crowded roads. Pollution spreads much beyond the earth. Extensive launching of rocket and artificial satellite as well as space probe programmes have left quite a large amount of debris in space. Space debris is multiplying day by day making space programmes extremely dangerous. NASA's American Space Vehicle "Columbia Shuttle" is an example. Ms. Kalpana Chawla and six other astronauts lost their lives in February 2003. The reason behind this was Columbia's collision with space debris.<sup>3</sup> Human activities pollute space and this in turn pollutes the environment of the earth and this leads to extinction of life. Man's requirements generate atmospheric pollution such as burning of coal and oil in thermal power generation.

### **3. Global Warming**

Global Warming occurs when there is an increase in carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) content in the atmosphere. Also ultra violet radiation causing damage to health occurs as a result of depletion of the ozone layer in the stratosphere (upper part of the atmosphere). An increase in concentration of carbon dioxide gas occurring from burning of fuel block a certain portion of the wave rays of the sun. This creates the green house effect.<sup>4</sup> The green house effect is a very old phenomena. The natural presence of carbon dioxide gases resulted in a heat trapping blanket that made life on earth possible. But the point here is that the industries today are emitting large quantities of its waste products into the atmosphere which stops additional infra red radiation from escaping. This thickens the atmospheric blanket, trapping more heat and warming up the earth considerably.<sup>5</sup>

### **4. Depletion of Natural Resources**

As per an article that appeared in The Times of India, July 20, 2019 "... Over the last 100 years or so, we have been exhausting water resources faster than they can be replenished. A recent report by NITI Ayog, claims that around 21 Indian cities will run out of ground water and face severe water scarcity by 2020."<sup>6</sup>

### **5. War and Insurgency**

War causes devastation of the environment by disturbing ecological balance and human population. Atmosphere is polluted by gases and rays produced by weapons of war. In modern times rocket and nuclear warfare can cause permanent damage to the earth.

### **Crisis in Social Environment**

Every society has its own aspirations, requirements and purposes. The quality of life of the people living in a society is determined through the functioning of a number of social organizations like home, religions institutions, educational institutions, political

institutions etc. These social institutions play an important role in preserving social values, customs, traditions, beliefs etc. and help in socializing the individuals.

The problems that manifest in society are many, some important ones are listed below:

1. Unemployment
2. Inequitable Distribution of Power
3. Divisive Tendencies
4. Dissensions Within The Family
5. Prejudiced and Rigid Outlook
6. Consumerism

## **1. Unemployment**

When people who are able to work and willing to work, fail to secure work or activity that gives them income or means of livelihood, we call this as unemployment. The problem of unemployment is on the rise each day. There are various types of unemployment- frictional, structural and cyclical. Frictional unemployment refers to transitional unemployment - the time lag between the jobs when a person is searching for a new job or is switching between the jobs. Structural unemployment results where there is a mismatch between the skills and requirements of new job opportunities. In this case the demand for labour is less than the supply of labour in an individual labour market. Robots are being manufactured to handle tasks which were earlier being done by human beings. Globalization and foreign competition also give rise to unemployment. Globalization is responsible for bringing changes in the patterns of trade between countries. For instance, Britain has lost forever a cost advantage in manufacturing goods such as motor cars, household and audio-visual goods. U.K. manufacturing industry has lost jobs as some production has shifted to lower cost centres in Eastern Europe and Far East Asia. Cyclical unemployment is involuntary unemployment due to a lack of demand

for goods and services. When there is a steep decline in growth, plant closures, business failures increase alarmingly. Firms increase unemployment to cut costs and maintain profits. This is known as labour shedding or down-sizing.

Also, jobs have become increasingly specialized. Once people are well-educated they refuse to accept a job which is not worthy of their intellect. India has a high percentage of educated unemployed. "Only 2.1% of illiterate urban men were unemployed in 2017-18, but 9.2% of men with at least secondary education didn't have a job. The gap was even wider among urban women - 0.8% of those uneducated were jobless whereas 20% of women with secondary or higher education were not employed."<sup>7</sup>

The consequence of unemployment refers to increase in crime, people getting depressed, economy of a country going down.

## **2. Inequitable Distribution of Power**

Behind the increasing interconnectedness promised by globalization, there are global decisions, policies and practices influenced or formulated by the wealthy and powerful. These powerful groups are either leaders of rich countries or multinational corporations and influential people. Amidst such tremendous external pressure, the poor nations and their people find themselves weak and powerless. As a result, in the global scenario, a few become wealthy whilst the majority struggle. This leads to poverty. Poverty is a major problem in the developing and under-developed world. It takes shape in different ways - starvation, malnutrition, chronic diseases, inadequate medical care, illiteracy, lack of basic requirements of life and exploitation. The causes of poverty vary from one country to the other and are ascribed to their history, governance and the dynamics of society.

Looking at India, one finds that there has been tremendous advancements in science and technology. As per the International Human Development Index (HDI) released by

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in September 2018, India occupied 130th rank among 189 countries.<sup>8</sup>

In times of war, a country's productivity and its GDP drops. Foreign and national business owners refrain from investing in the country because of political and social turmoil and overall instability. Lack of foreign aid and its misuse lead to poverty. Due to international sanctions foreign assistance is not provided. Funds are misused by rulers instead of investing in education and other social welfare schemes. Political leaders extract money to enhance the quality of life of their citizens. But they often use it for personal benefits.

### **3. Divisive Tendencies**

The human beings all over the world are divided into groups - racial, national, religious, linguistic, economic, political, professional etc. This leads to divisive tendencies creating an imbalance causing harm to the society.

### **4. Dissensions within the Family**

The family is a fundamental unit of human society. It exercises a profound influence over its members. Its influence in infancy determines the personality structure of the individual. The striking problem that confronts the modern family is its instability. The marriage bonds have weakened. The worst sufferers are the children and this leads to juvenile crime and delinquency.

### **5. Prejudiced and Rigid Outlook**

The human mind over the years is being conditioned to respect nationalistic ideals, religious systems, beliefs, leader's ad hero myths in order to find security. This in turn gives rise to more enmity and insecurity, leading to a static society, incapable of moving ahead. Such a prejudiced outlook leads to inequality. The barriers that come in the way of equalization of educational opportunities in India are mainly due to caste, gender, class and regional disparities, arising from a prejudiced and rigid outlook.

## **6. Consumerism**

The effects of consumerism cannot be ignored in the political and social levels. At the political level, consumer elitism may give more importance to the benefits of specialized learning and practice. At the social level, it challenges the traditional, religious and aesthetic sensitivities in all their forms. It transforms human relations through transforming the social relations of production, consumption and communication. It also transforms the social relations of pleasure and fulfillment and in the process, weakens the momentum of cultural traditions.<sup>9</sup>

### **Role of Education in solving Environmental Problems**

Lack of proper education leads to such problems like environmental pollution, over population, unemployment, divisive tendencies, prejudiced outlook, inequitable distribution of power, consumerism. Education should, therefore, aim at producing citizens who are aware of their responsibilities. Merely a formal education cannot solve these issues. All types of education - formal, informal, non-formal have to play their role. One finds that contemporary education is certainly deficient in solving such present day problems, prompting one to seriously consider an altogether different vision of education. Such a vision becomes all the more important in view of the fact that the dangers of fissiparous tendencies in the past have magnified enormously and the wrong use of power can result in the total annihilation of mankind by nuclear weapons etc. One's outlook on life is not right and there is a need to find out where mankind has gone wrong. One looks at the world as a killing field. Nature has become a commodity to be used for satisfying the desires of man. Education should help human beings to evolve consciously.

India is an example of a 'developing country'. 'Developing' means that there is an enormous amount of things yet to be done. Therefore, one must look for possibilities - for possibilities are rampant all around. One must invest their life in knowing something

- putting their heart and soul into something and letting genius blossom. It is not qualification that counts but competencies that matter.

While dealing with the problem of unemployment, one finds that India's skill training programmes must not only equip youth with marketable skills to make them employable but also train youth to be self employed or take up entrepreneurship. Graduates in India as of now are not sufficiently trained to be employed by industries. This is due to insufficient inputs during education, thereby creating a gap between ability and skill required. Skill development is not an additional course that can be added to a university curriculum but it needs to be integrated into the training and education of a youth who will have to be readily employable and competent enough to be part of the mechanism which runs the country's industry. Imparting skill development should enable the recipient to be capable of not only fulfilling the demands of industry but also creating newer avenues for employment. The need for skill development for employability is across every section of the workforce. It must be appreciated from the lowest rung of the ladder to the highest.

Labour intensive technology should be encouraged in place of capital intensive technology. Seasonal unemployment is found in agriculture sector and agro based industries. For this agriculture should have multiple cropping - plantations, horticulture, dairying and animal husbandry to be given considerable attention. Cottage industries to be encouraged.

There is need for more employment exchanges where employment opportunities can be provided to people. Those who are self employed - like in agriculture, trade, cottage industries should be given financial assistance, providing them with raw materials and technical training. Employment programmes like irrigation, roads, power, rural electrification etc. can provide better employment to people. Industries on cooperative basis should be encouraged. Also there is need for decentralization of industrial activity.

If industrial activities are centralized at one place, there will be less employment opportunities in the under developed areas.

Another important issue is growth of population. This should be checked in order to solve unemployment problems. One often sees that if there is vacancy for one position, hundreds or thousands apply for the post and only one gets the job whereas the rest remain unemployed. Family planning programmes to be implemented affectively.

The process of education does not merely apply to reading books. It is also about doing several co-curricular activities that give a broader meaning to life in general and education in particular. Opportunities for such holistic development are not enough in India. Facilities for the same are either lacking or not easily accessible. Even where facilities exist, there is lack of information about the same. There has to be community based programmes and work on social issues. Community engagement refers to the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. Communication skills, problem solving, interactive skills, civic responsibilities are enhanced when the students become familiar with the living conditions of the people of the community. Also, it can provide infrastructure for placements. While preparing students for employability due consideration to be given to such issues like facing a job interview, preparing to be a profitable employee, adapting oneself to a working environment. The realities of a workplace should be included in the curriculum and rote learning should be discouraged. Practical and hands - on training, field based experiences by organizing camps, inviting industries to give talks and demonstrations in campus and forming short periods of training is essential.

Last but not the least, awareness about preventing air, water, noise, soil pollution can be created through several educational programmes initiated from time to time on a regular basis. This applies to recycling of waste products, water conservation, setting up agro

industries, horticulture etc. India covers 17% of world population and has 3.5% of total world's water resources, out of which 40% of river water is depleting. It has 160 million hectares of arable land and out of which 104 million hectares is under soil distress.<sup>10</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Man's existence is totally dependent on the existence of the Planet. Nature has become a commodity to be used for satisfying the desires of man and this attitude should be removed from the minds of men. People feel a deep disconnect with themselves, others and their environment. In order to overcome their negative emotions of emptiness and loneliness they crave for intense pleasure. This leads to compulsive consumerism and men indiscriminately go on to satisfy their desires. Compulsive consumerism affects one's relationship with nature and men continue to mindlessly exploit nature. Education should develop within human beings a feeling to captivate the world rather than conquer it. This would lead to progress of mankind and global wellbeing.

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